NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 388. Price, Five Cents.

THE MURDER AT LINDEN FELLS

OR

THE MYSTERY OF THE CADILLAC NEEDLE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

"Dead! Good heavens! You must be mistaken!" "He is dead, sir, and quite cold. I saw you as you approached the house, almost at the same moment I discovered him, sir, and so I came directly to you."

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *238 William St., N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 388. NEW YORK, June 4, 1904. **Price Five Cents.**

THE MURDER AT LINDEN FELLS;

OR,

The Mystery of the Cadillac Needle.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

"IF I AM GUILTY, I WANT YOU TO CONVICT ME."

The hands of the clock pointed at half-past five, one beautiful June morning, when Nick Carter, having just finished with his morning exercises and cold plunge, was told that there was a gentleman in the reception room who wished to see him on matters of the utmost importance, as soon as he was at liberty to descend, and the servant who brought the message to her master, passed a card through the partly opened doorway, upon which was engraved in fashionable block lettering:

REGINALD MEADOWS DANTON.
Linden Fells.

"Young Danton, of Linden Fells, eh?" murmured the detective, as he proceeded with his toilet after placing the card on the dresser. "What in the world can he want at this hour? I should not hesitate to wager a considerable amount that he has never been out of bed at this hour before in all his life, unless it was because he had stayed up all night. Reggie Danton! Humph! Whether he is in trouble or not, it is safe to say that he believes he is, or he wouldn't be here to see me so early in the morning."

Ten minutes later Nick entered the room where his caller was awaiting him, only to find him pacing up and down between the window and the door, apparently under the greatest strain of excitement.

Nick Carter's half-contemptuous, half-humorous remark, "Young Danton, of Linden Fells," had been peculiarly appropriate, for Reginald Meadows Danton exactly filled one's ideas of a young man of possibilities—and perhaps probabilities—who hailed from somewhere in the world of society and wealth.

He was neither tall nor short, fat nor lean; nor did there seem to be a distinguished trait about his appearance or his manner, and yet there was an indefinable something which compelled a stranger to glance at him a second time, and then to wonder why he had done so. He was Reggie Danton to everybody, several times a millionaire in his own right, and the son of a man who had long since ceased to count his millions by units, having adopted multiples instead.

Linden Fells? Well, it was—and still is, although its name has since been changed—a magnificent estate situated on the bank of the Hudson River within a reasonable distance of New York. A place where once upon a time a very rich and eccentric German had brought his family and lived while he awaited the pardon of his emperor, and who had also brought with him a love for his own *Unter den Linden.* And as the estate was heavily wooded, he had given it the name of Linden Fells. Later, when the pardon came from his emperor, he had sold out for a song and returned to the fatherland; and so, Horace Danton, the father of Reggie, became possessed of it.

Then Linden Fells became transformed.

From the home of a recluse who used it only as a place of refuge while he awaited permission to return to his own country, it was turned into an open house of entertainment, for the Dantons liked to "sling things."

Mrs. Danton was a beautiful women of middle age who still looked thirty—scarcely older, in fact, than her two children, Reginald and Mercedes, aged respectively, twenty-three and nineteen.

It had happened in the past that Nick Carter had done some little business for the head of the house of Danton, but it had been of a commercial character, and he had never met the other members of the family, although naturally they were all known to him by sight, as well as by the reputations they had earned for themselves in their own separate ways. Mrs. Danton—or the senora, as she was often called because of her Spanish ancestry—because she was a leader of society and a giver of the most lavish entertainments in New York and Newport; Reggie, because he was a self-confessed high roller who was inevitably getting into some sort of hot water and paying his way out of it with gold—whom everybody talked about, and laughed at, and wondered what he would do next, but who was nevertheless generally well liked, and among those who knew him best, respected, too; and Mercedes!

The reputation of Mercedes Danton can be comprehended in three words. She was beautiful, she was brilliant, and she was, above all, good.

Everybody loved Mercedes. Her father adored her; her mother worshiped her; her brother idolized her; her servitors almost deified her; and she merited it all.

Reference to her upon any occasion was comprehended in the utterance of her first name only. There was but one Mercedes in the world, one queen of beauty, one fountain of sympathy and goodness—Mercedes.

She was nineteen, with the poise, the repose and the presence of twenty-five. She was tall, regal, as graceful as a fawn; she had unfathomable, gypsy eyes, hair of a dead black, with a faint suggestion of waviness, and when the light struck it just right, a touch of amber somewhere in the depth of the tresses which disappeared as it came and which was inevitably changed to a reflection upon rather than from it; and with all her somber hair and eyes, her long black lashes and brunette presence, she had the complexion of an Irish beauty.

To describe Mercedes as beautiful is inadequate, for she was the standard of beauty.

And now, that we have outlined the chain of thought which flitted through the mind of Nick Carter as he descended the stairs to meet his early caller, we will return to the moment of their greeting.

"Good-morning, Mr. Danton," said Nick, as he entered the room. "You rose early this morning."

"Yes. That is—fact is—I haven't been to bed. Thank you. Yes; I will sit down. Are you Mr. Carter? Mr. Nick Carter? Pardon me for asking, but I wish to be sure."

"Yes. I am Nick Carter."

"I have heard my father speak of you several times, Mr. Carter. I suppose you are aware that my governor is abroad just now?"

"I think I noticed in one of the papers, about a month ago, a mention that he had sailed. I did not know that he had or had not returned."

"No. He's over there still. I say, Mr. Carter, do I look excited?"

"Well, yes, a little," replied Nick, smiling. "Has something happened to upset you?"

"Well, rather! Do I talk as if I could tell a connected story? Eh?"

"Why, yes."

"You'll pardon me, I know, but you see I wish to be sure. The fact is—— By Jove, old chap, I'm all of a tremble yet. I've been trying for the last two hours—all the while, in fact, since I started to come here to see you, to pull myself together so that I could tell you a connected story, and 'pon my life I'm not at all sure of myself yet. It's awful, you know, Mr. Carter! Horribly awful!"

"What is?"

"The murder."

"The murder? Do you mean to say that you are speaking seriously and that you have come here to see me about a murder?"

"Yes. That's the long and short of it."

"Who is killed? Where was the crime committed? I hope, Mr. Danton, that this is not a specimen of one of the jokes you are so fond of perpetrating," said Nick, severely.

"Joke! gad! I wish it were a joke! No, Mr. Carter, it is very far from being a joke, I'm sorry to say. It's a murder of the first water. A regular gem of the blue-stone variety. An out-and-out, dyed-in-the-wool, double-back-action, deliberate murder, carefully planned and scientifically executed, and"—he leaned forward in his chair and looked the detective straight in the eyes—"the joke will be on me, don't you know."

"What do you mean, Danton? You will have to be more explicit if you wish me to pretend to understand you."

"Good Lord, I'm trying to be explicit. I mean that I will be accused of this murder—I mean that there will be developed the best chain of circumstantial evidence you ever heard of, to convict me, and I mean that——"

He paused and rose from his chair, crossing the room to the window and then returning.

"Well?" said Nick. "What were you about to add to your statement?"

"I mean," he said, slowly and impressively, "that I am not, myself, positive of my own innocence."

There was half a moment of silence after that extraordinary statement, and it was Danton who spoke first.

"Do you wonder now that I asked you if I looked excited, and if you thought I could tell a connected story?"

"In the light of the statement you have just made, it seems doubtful if you can tell one," said Nick, slowly. "You tell me that there has been a murder committed, that you will be accused of the crime, that there will be circumstantial evidence which will tend to convict you of the crime, and that you are not sure that you are not guilty. Those statements are rather extraordinary, coming from a man who is supposed to be sane, Mr. Danton."

"Well, all the same, they are God's truths, every one of them."

"Then suppose you tell me why you have come to me at five o'clock in the morning?" said Nick, severely. "If you are not sure that you have not committed a crime—which is a statement to be taken with a large proportion of salt—you are more than half convinced that you have committed one. My business, Mr. Danton, is to catch criminals, not to protect them."

"Well, that's all right. That's just what I want you to do. That's why I came here at five o'clock in the morning."

"Why?"

"Because I want you to catch and convict the criminal. If I am guilty, I want you to convict me of it, just as if I were not here to engage your services. I want you to prove who did commit the crime, and if I did it, I want you to prove it to my own satisfaction,

as well as to a jury of twelve men. I've been asleep ever since I was born, Mr. Carter, but I woke up this morning in earnest, and I'm awake now, to stay awake."

CHAPTER II.

THE QUARREL IN REGINALD DANTON'S ROOM.

"You seem to be very much in earnest in what you say, Mr. Danton," said the detective.

"I am very much in earnest, sir."

"Well, in the first place, suppose you tell me who is dead. Since you say that a murder has been committed and it is not unlikely that you did it, it is well to know something of the *corpus dilecti.* Who was murdered?"

"Ramon Orizaba; my mother's guest."

"Your cousin, is he—or rather, was he not?"

"A kinsman of my mother's so far removed that the ties of blood are very thin; still, he has passed as our cousin. You know of him. He has been our guest, at intervals of two or three months at a time, for half a dozen seasons."

"Oh, yes; I know of him. Now where was he killed?"

"In my own room at the Fells."

"In your room? Where were you?"

"I was there."

"There in the room, when he was killed?"

"Just that."

"Then you did it—by accident, perhaps—and that is the reason why you do not——"

"No. You're wrong."

"Well, what, then?"

"I was there when he was killed, at least I suppose I was, but I was either unconscious, or asleep, for I did not see it done, and I did not know that he was dead until I awoke, at three o'clock this morning, and found him."

"Had you quarreled?"

"We always quarreled. There never was a time when we did not quarrel."

"How was he killed? What killed him?"

Danton left his chair and crossed to the windc again, but after a moment he returned and stood facir the detective.

"I was waiting for that question," he said, slowl "and wondering when it would come, for I had not y determined how I would reply to it. The fact is, M Carter, I believe that even the coroner and the phy sicians will find it difficult to determine at first, ho Orizaba was killed, but nevertheless, although I hav not examined the body, save to look at one spot wher I expected to find something, I can tell you what killed him."

"Then tell me."

"He was killed with a glass needle, three inches in length, and of the size of a common darning needle. Orizaba's hair grew very low on the back of his neck, and the weapon I have described was jabbed into the vertebræ at that point."

"So that death was almost instantaneous, I suppose?"

"It must have been."

"Now, how do you know that he was killed as you describe?"

"Because I looked at that spot to find out."

"Why did you look there?"

"Because I expected to find what I did find."

"Why?"

"Because I had meditated killing him in just that way."

"Good God, Mr. Danton——"

"It's true."

"In that case, I do not see what I can do to assist you. A man who will meditate such an infamous thing and then have the effrontery to come here and confess it to me in cold blood expecting me to sympathize with his troubles, must be beyond the pale of human sympathy."

"Wait, Mr. Carter. I quite agree with you—in the abstract; but this is different."

"I cannot determine the nice points of reasoning of that kind, sir."

"Just listen to me, won't you? I have been careful to tell you all the worst phases of this case first."

"There certainly could not be others much worse, unless you are about to confess that you had progressed so far in your meditations that you had actually provided yourself with a needle such as you have described."

"I had such a needle in my possession," replied Danton, smiling pathetically; "and moreover, it has disappeared from its accustomed place, so I have no means of knowing that it is not the one now actually imbedded in the neck of my cousin."

"Danton," said the detective, "since you have been in this room with me, you have succeeded in giving me several very different impressions concerning you. My first glance at you when I came into the room, was that you had been on a spree and that you had done something which had the effect of sobering you suddenly, so that you came to me to get you out of your trouble. The second impression was that you were in real trouble, but that it concerned another more than yourself. My third was that you were sincere in your statement that you did not know whether you had committed a crime or not, and was willing to take the consequences if you had done so, and my present one is that you are telling me a story in a slipshod fashion which I do not like, and which is not calculated to win my appreciation or my assistance. Now, sir, if you care to prolong this conversation, there is only one course for you to pursue, and that is to tell me your story, commencing at the beginning and continuing on to the end—and that you do it in some sort of connected style, so that I can follow you."

"Well, sir," replied Danton, slowly and seriously, "I'll try. The fact is, I am almost crazy. I scarcely know what I am saying at all. I have tried so hard to pull myself together since I started out to find you, and I have endeavored so strenuously to keep calm since I have been here, that I begin to fear that I shall fail in both."

"Tell me your story," said Nick, shortly.

"Will you permit me to make two beginnings? They seem necessary."

"Tell me your story."

"Well, in the first place I attended a banquet at the club last night, and while there I drank of everything in sight, from cocktails through the still wines and champagnes to the cordials and cognac. In short, I became very drunk."

"I can believe that. It was not your first experience."

"No. Orizaba was with me at the club. We started for home together in the same cab."

"You did not drive out to the Fells in a cab, did you?"

"Oh, no. We caught a train from the station. I suppose it was the twelve-thirty, since that is the last train out."

"Well?"

"I remember entering the cab with Orizaba, and I remember leaving the cab with him, at the station; but I do not remember riding in the cars with him."

"That is not surprising. But go on."

"I know that when the conductor awakened me and told me we were at the Fells, I left the train alone. Orizaba was not with me then, for I remember distinctly that I left the train alone and walked from the station to the Fells alone."

"How far is it?"

"About half a mile."

"Were you still under the influence of the wine you had drank?"

"Undeniably. In plain English, I was very drunk. So full, in fact, that I remember that I stopped and held several serious arguments with myself during that walk of half a mile."

"You are sure you talked only to yourself?"

"Why, yes; at least, that is my impression. I am quite sure that Orizaba was not with me then."

"Yet you are positive that you caught the same train?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, go on with your story."

"It was very warm last night, if you remember. I recall that when I arrived at the Fells the combination of wine and half a mile walk had heated me considerably, and I seated myself in one of the piazza chairs to cool off. Now I cannot tell you whether I sat there

one minute or half an hour, for I don't know; I only know that it could not have been more than half an hour, because the train I rode out on is due at the Fells at one-fifteen, my walk from the station to the house must have consumed a quarter of an hour, which would bring the time up to two o'clock, and my watch is stopped at two-thirty."

"What has the stopping of your watch got to do with it?"

"Only this: That I cannot start it. Something inside it is broken, and I argue that I must have broken it while winding the watch."

"Well?"

"Drunk or sober, I have always been in the habit of winding my watch the last thing before removing my waistcoat, and never at any other time."

"So you think that you stopped your watch by breaking it while winding it, the last thing before going to bed?"

"Yes; only I didn't go to bed. In fact, I didn't make any preparation to do so, more than to remove my coat and vest. But I am getting ahead of my story."

"Tell it in your own way."

"We will say, then, that I went upstairs at half-past two, after sitting on the piazza for about half an hour."

"Very good."

"When I entered my room, Orizaba was there before me."

"Ah! So he did come on the same train with you, and doubtless walked from the station with you also."

"That I do not know. The point is that he seemed greatly surprised to see me—he appeared, when I entered the room, as if I was the last person he expected to see."

"You were evidently sober enough to take cognizance of that fact."

"There are reasons why, as you will understand. Orizaba was standing at my desk when I entered the room. He had turned on the lights, and he had opened my desk, although I supposed the only key that would open it was in my pocket. He was looking at something—some of my private letters, I suppose, when I entered the room, and he dropped them on the desk with an exclamation of rage, and flew at me like a tiger-cat."

"Did you fight?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. I was not angry; only astonished. I know that we rolled to the floor together and that presently we both rose to our feet. Then, I remember that I ordered him from the room, and that he apologized—or tried to do so. But I remember, also, that I refused to listen to any apologies from him. I was angry, and I told him that I wanted nothing more to do with him. In fact, I told him many things that I had long had in mind to tell him some day, and ended by ordering him from my room again."

"Did he go, then?"

"No. He refused to go. He dropped himself into a big chair near one of the windows, and said he would stay where he was until he got ready to leave."

"And what did you do then?"

"I told him if it wasn't for the noise it would make, I would either throw him out, or shoot the top of his head off, but as it was, and because I didn't want to disturb Mercedes—you know her rooms are quite near to mine—he could stay where he was if he wanted to, but I warned him that as soon as I sobered up I would go to my mother and father, both, and tell them everything I knew about him, and also that I would see to it that he was kicked out of the house for good."

"And then——"

"He only grinned, and said something about it being a more difficult job than I supposed to get him out of that family—that he would remain until he chose to go of his own free will, and——"

"Well? And——"

"Well, to be plain, I told him to go to hades. Then I threw myself on the couch. Every light in the room was going, but I must have fallen asleep at once."

"And the time must have been as late as half-past two o'clock then, you think."

"Yes; or even a little later."

"What happened next?"

"I woke up."

"Woke up to find him dead? Is that what you wish to tell me?"

"Yes; just that, but let me explain the particulars."

"Go ahead."

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF A DEATH WOUND.

"I woke up with the feeling that somebody had called to me, and I started to a sitting posture on the couch before I was aware where I was. Then, of course, a glance told me my surroundings."

"And you still had the impression that somebody had called to you?"

"Yes."

"Called your name?"

"Yes; and by my middle name, which is never used outside my immediate family. My father, mother and sister always call me Meadow, or Med."

"And your cousin? Did he call you so, also?"

"Rarely. Usually he addressed me simply as Danton, and at times with the familiarity of some of my club friends, he called me Dan. But I discouraged such familiarities on his part, for I never liked him. In fact, I always hated him—despised him, hated him and feared him as well; but that is part of the story I shall tell you from the second beginning. You know I asked you to give me two beginnings."

"Well; you started wide awake with the feeling that somebody had called you, and that your middle name had been used. Go on."

"Not wide awake. I was dazed. There was an instant when I did not know where I was."

"Naturally."

"Then there were several moments when I could not remember how I got there, although I could tell that I was in my own room."

"But it all came back to you as you thought it over?"

"Not all; and what did come back to my recollection, came very slowly. Let me tell you things chronologically."

"Certainly."

"I rubbed my eyes and saw that I was in my own room. Then I looked around to see who had called me, and discovered Orizaba seated in the big chair by the window; but for the life of me I could not remember how he got there. I leaned back again among the pillows of the couch to think it over, and then I remembered that somebody had called to me, and I sung out to Orizaba to know if he had done it.

"He didn't answer, and I called to him again, and then it came over me that we had attended the same banquet at my club, and that we had come home together—that is, I remembered the cab part of it—and I figured that he was asleep, and had either spoken my name in his sleep, or I had dreamed that I heard it.

"Well, I remained in that position, thinking things over and trying to get things clear in my mind, for several minutes, and then I got up, stretched myself, looked at my watch, saw it was half-past two—— "

"But you had removed your coat and vest. Where was your watch?"

"In my vest on a chair beside the couch."

"All right. Go on."

"My watch said half-past two. I felt rocky, so I turned out three or four of the lights, leaving only one of them burning, and went into my bathroom. In about three minutes I was in a cold bath, and nothing in this world ever felt so good as that did."

"It pulled you together, too, did it not?"

"Amazingly. Things came back to me that I had totally forgotten—but still I was hazy about Orizaba's presence in my room, and remembered nothing of the quarrel."

"And then——"

"I finished my bath and passed back into my room, and so on through it to the sleeping room which is just beyond. It was my intention to go to bed at once, but as I entered my bedroom, there was a clock facing me, and the hands pointed at half-past three. I could not believe that I had been an hour in the bath, so I went back into the other room and took another look at my watch, only to discover that it still said half-past two and that it had stopped. Then I thought that possibly it was run down, and I turned the

stem, only to discover that the main spring was broken. All the same, if I broke that main spring at half-past two, I had not slept much more than half an hour in all, taking the time for the bath into consideration."

"That is quite evident."

"Well, I turned then to take another look at Orizaba. To tell the truth I did not like the idea of his sleeping in my room, and I couldn't yet understand why he did so."

"Well?"

"I hesitated a moment or so, and then I crossed the room to his side and spoke to him. He neither replied nor moved, and so I seized him by the shoulder and shook him."

Danton shuddered as he uttered this last sentence—shuddered and uttered a low groan.

"And then——" said Nick.

"Why, then his head fell over on one side, and I saw that his eyes were half open, and—— Well, I seemed to know instantly that he was dead."

"What did you do then?"

"I didn't do anything at first. I only stood there staring at him in amazed wonder. I think my senses as well as my muscles were paralyzed."

"Quite likely."

"I replaced him as well as I could, in the position he had occupied before I shook him out of it, and then I felt of his flesh. It wasn't cold and it was not warm. It was sort of clammy. There isn't anything else that I know of that feels just as his flesh felt to my touch then."

"I can understand that."

"Well, the remarkable part of that moment is that everything about our conduct after we were in my room together, which I have already told you, came back to me in flash then, as if I had not forgotten it at all, and at the same instant, I seemed to know what it was that had killed Orizaba. My God, Mr. Carter, you don't believe I did it, do you? You don't believe I could have done such a thing in my sleep, do you?"

"No. Emphatically I do not. Go on, Mr. Danton."

"I seemed to know what had killed him, as well as if I had seen it done—as perfectly as if I had done it myself, although then it did not occur to me that I had done it, nor as a surprising fact that I should seem to know how it was done."

"We will go into that later on, Danton. Just now I want you to be particular to tell me everything that you did from that moment on, until you entered this room here; and I want you to tell me also, as nearly as you can, the impressions that fastened themselves on your mind between that moment and now. There is a sub-consciousness here which I wish to fathom. And—there is one thing which I want you to bear in mind."

"What is that?"

"That no matter what impression you are making upon the mind of Nick Carter, you have not yet satisfied a jury that you are not detailing a cleverly concocted story—or, in plain English, that you did not actually kill Orizaba with deliberation and malice prepense. Do you understand?"

"Yes; I understand."

"Well, continue from the point where it came over you suddenly that you knew how the murder was committed. What was it that forced that idea upon you?"

"Nothing. It came accidentally. I discovered that in raising his head to replace it against the upholstering of the chair in the position it had occupied before I shook him, I was unconsciously examining the back of his neck under his hair, which, as I have said, grows downward, quite out of sight below his collar—in fact, below his shirt band, when he has no collar adjusted."

"You were searching there unconsciously, you say?"

"Quite so, it would seem, since I realized suddenly what I was doing, and only realized it when my search revealed a speck of blood where it had oozed out and hardened into a crimson bead among the short hair on the back of his neck."

"And then——"

"Then, still without a full realization of my acts, I wiped away the speck of blood with my handkerchief — wiped it away with great care and looked for the sign of a wound underneath the spot where it had been."

"Did you find one?"

"Barely that; nothing more. Just a little mark like

the prick of a pin, turned blue, and altogether unnoticeable unless you should search diligently for it. I shall come to that again, sir, later, but it belongs with that part of my story which has the second beginning."

"Very good. For the present stick to the text you are on. What did you do next?"

"I think in all that I did then, I acted automatically. I replaced his head in position with great care. I even walked around in front of him to see that he looked quite as naturally asleep as when I first discovered him."

"And then——"

"In one of the inside compartments of my desk I keep a small metallic casket in which I store a few treasured keepsakes. Among the things I kept in that casket was the needle I have already described. It had been fastened into a cork handle, like the handle of a bead awl. The casket was invariably locked—I do not remember ever in my life to have left it unlocked—but now, when I went to it, it was not only unlocked, but it was open, and—the needle was not there."

"What about the cork handle?"

"That was there, in place, where it belonged, but the needle had been broken off short against the cork."

"Well, what then?"

"I took the cork handle from the box and laid it on the desk. Then I crossed the room to my discarded trousers—for I had not dressed since my bath and had on only my pajamas—and felt in my pocket for my keys."

"You found them?"

"Yes. Then I crossed back again to the desk, locked the casket and replaced it where it belonged, after which I closed my desk and locked it, but not until I had placed the cork handle to one side. Later, I put it in my pocket and brought it here with me. Here——"

"Never mind. We will come to that later. You told me in the beginning of your story that when you entered your room after leaving the piazza, you found Orizaba there, at your desk, and that the desk was open, although you believed that you possessed the only key that would fit its lock. How do you account for that?"

"I don't account for it; I only know it is the truth. Every word that I have told you is the solemn truth, so help me God!"

CHAPTER IV.

TRYING TO FORGE HIS OWN FETTERS.

"What were your personal sensations while all this was taking place? How did you feel about it all?" asked Nick.

"That is one of the strangest features of the case, Mr. Carter," replied Danton, "for while I seemed to know all about everything, as correctly as if I had seen the crime committed, it never once occurred to me that I was myself the guilty party. That aspect of the case was not impressed upon me till afterward."

"When did it first occur to you?"

"Wait, and I will tell you. Through all that I did from the moment I discovered that Orizaba was dead until I began to put on my street clothes, I seem to have acted mechanically, as if I were really two beings, one of which was watching the other, passively. The finding of the wound on the back of his neck; the discovery of the open casket, the broken needle and the empty cork handle—none of those things seemed to surprise me at all, until I had begun the operation of dressing, and was in fact half clothed, when it all came over me with a suddenness that made me stagger back against the wall like—well, as if I had received a blow in the face."

"What came over you? What made you stagger?"

"The thought that perhaps I might have committed that horrible deed in my sleep."

"No, sir! Disabuse your mind of any such thought as that, now and forever. You did not do murder in your sleep."

"Well, I know that I did not do it at all, then."

"Certainly you know that. Others do not and will not. But you may rest assured that no person on earth will ever believe that you did it in your sleep.

and I least of all. And was that all that came over you and made you stagger back against the wall?"

"No; not all."

"Well, what else?"

"The thought of Mercedes."

"What had the thought of your sister to do with it?" asked Nick.

"It was the thought of what she would think of the matter that brought home to me the possibility that I had committed the crime in my sleep."

"How so?"

"Simply because I have more than once told Mercedes—in jest of course, only she did not always believe that I was in jest—that some day I would kill Orizaba."

"Indeed. You have often made that threat to her, have you?"

"A hundred times; perhaps more. Very often. I have even showed her the needle."

"Ah! The needle again. You say you have shown it to your sister?"

"Yes; twice."

"And she knew where you kept it?"

"Certainly."

"Where did you obtain it?"

"It was given to me three years ago in Paris. It has a grewsome history, but whether it is true or not, I do not know. I only know that I was told that it had for years been the favorite sort of weapon for a famous—or rather an infamous—murderer, who was at last beheaded for his crimes. It was said that this needle was found in his possession when he was last captured."

"A French criminal named Cadillac. I know of him. The story is doubtless true. But to return to your sister. Why did you show her the needle and threaten to use it on your cousin?"

"Mr. Carter, if you don't mind, I would much prefer that you do not refer to Orizaba as my cousin. At best the relationship was so far removed that it cannot be considered, and I really doubt if there was any at all. I think he was an impostor, and whether he was or not, and notwithstanding the fact that he is dead and I am not sure that I did not kill him in my sleep, or somehow, I know he was a scoundrel of the worst sort. I hope I did not kill him, but I can truthfully say that I am glad that he is dead. Don't call him my cousin."

"Very well. Now let us return to your sister."

"Well?"

"Why did you show the needle to her and threaten to use it on Orizaba?"

"The answer to that question belongs to the other story."

"Never mind. Let me have it now."

"Mercedes has known, ever since we have had any knowledge of Orizaba, that I hated him. In a word, my hatred of him has arisen chiefly because of his determined court paid to her. I have known all along that he was totally unworthy of her, but——"

"Then why did you not put a stop to his attentions at once?"

"Because Mercedes would not permit it."

"Ah!"

"For some reason she chose to defend him always—that is, whenever I attacked him."

"Do you mean by that, that she favored his suit?"

"No; I do not mean that, for that is what she did not do. I have never thought that she favored him, and yet on more than one occasion she has constituted herself a sort of quasi protectress over him whenever we have had our accustomed three-cornered fight at the home concerning him."

"What do you mean by accustomed three-cornered fight?"

"I refer to wordy battles which often took place among my mother, my sister and myself, concerning Orizaba. These were usually begun in raillery, but always ended in bitter words."

"And on such occasions you say that your sister championed Orizaba?"

"Championed is not the word; it is too strong. She took his part, if that expression can be said to mean anything."

"I understand. Now let us return to the room, and to the moment when you staggered back against

"Good," with the thought in your mind that your sister would believe that you had carried out your threat and killed Orizaba. Was there any other reason than those you have mentioned, why it should suddenly have occurred to you that she would think you guilty of the crime?"

"Yes. One other."

"What was that?"

"Merely the fact that the very last words I uttered to Mercedes before I left the house last night to attend the banquet, referred to such a possibility."

"How? In what manner? Explain."

"She came into my room just as I was on the point of leaving it to come here to the city for the banquet. When she entered the room I was seated at my desk engaged in addressing the envelope of a letter I had just written, and which I wished to post when I went out. The casket in which I kept the needle was open on the desk before me——"

"How did that happen?"

"I had opened it to get out a diamond stud which I was then wearing and I had not yet closed and locked the casket and returned it to its place."

"Well? Mercedes entered the room; what then?"

"She expressed the wish that I would enjoy myself at the banquet, and also the hope that I would drink less wine than usual. I replied that when she and my mother decided to rid the house of Orizaba, I would be willing to give up wine altogether, and that the mere fact that he was to be present at the banquet was sufficient to make me get drunk, and I closed my remarks by taking Cadillac's needle from the casket and holding it up to her view.

"'As surely as there is a kingdom of heaven,' I said, 'I'll ish this thing into his vertebræ some day, if he hangs around here much longer. I've had about all of him that I can stand.'

"What reply did she make?"

"None whatever. She rose and left the room. Five minutes later I left the house and came to New York."

"Had you returned the needle to the casket?"

"Certainly."

"Did you lock the casket?"

"I did."

"You are positive of that?"

"Certainly."

"And the desk itself?"

"I am equally positive that I locked that also."

"Well, now let us return again to the moment when after the discovery of Orizaba's death you staggered back against the wall. What did you do next, after that?"

"I finished my dressing with all the haste I could command. I put the cork handle of Cadillac's needle in my pocket. I locked the casket and put it away again. I locked the desk. I tiptoed around the room with great care, and as far as I was able to do so in my more or less dazed condition, I left things exactly as I supposed they were before I returned there from the banquet. Then I came out of the house silently, hurried to the station, caught the four-ten train for the city, and here I am."

"Did you suppose that you could cover up the fact that you had returned to the house in company with the man who is now dead?"

"I supposed so at the time I attempted to accomplish it; I know now that such a thing would be impossible. There is the cab driver who took us to the station here in the city; there is the good-natured conductor who knows me, who waked me when we were approaching our station; he has waked me many times in the same manner and he would not forget it. There is the conductor who came down on the four-ten train, who expressed unbounded surprise because I was going to the city so early in the morning. He had never seen me going in that direction at that time of day before, and he even asked me, jokingly, if there was anybody dead at the house, and I, like a fool replied to him."

"What did you say?"

"I told him yes; that Orizaba was dead."

Nick Carter almost laughed, so bright was the smile that suffused his face.

"It seems to you now, that it was a foolish thing for you to do, to tell the conductor that Orizaba was dead," he said, "but I will assure you that it was in

reality the most sensible thing you have done in this whole affair. Now, two or three more questions, and then we will start at once for the Fells. We should be able to get there, I think, before the body of Ramon Orizaba is discovered, since it is not likely that anyone will enter your room at this hour in the morning."

CHAPTER V.

BROKEN LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF CLEWS.

"What are the other questions, Mr. Carter?" asked Danton.

"I merely want you to tell me in as few words as possible, the other story you have referred to several times."

"It is only about Ramon Orizaba."

"That is why I wish to hear it."

"I first knew of his existence about five years ago; I think, also, that my mother heard of him for the first time then. He came to her, during my absence, with letters of introduction which are said to have established his relationship to her. I have never correctly understood what that relationship is, more than that he was a distant cousin on her mother's side of the family. Nevertheless, Mr. Carter, I have long been convinced that there was something—some relationship, some power, some parcel of family history, some deviltry of some kind somewhere, which accounted for the studied insolence he often assumed to me and to others, and more than once, in his cups, he has as much as told me that it was out of my power to drive him out of the family."

"You are making a strong insinuation against your own family, Danton."

"I insinuate nothing against my mother; you must not understand me in that way. She is and always has been the soul of goodness. She is so good that she would suffer untold tortures to protect others, if she considered it a part of her duty to another to do so. It is some hold that which this man had upon her, in my opinion."

"But you do not even conjecture what it was?"

"No."

"Do you think your sister might know what it was?"

"I am positive that she does know."

"And her being thus informed would account for her standing between you and Orizaba, in your quarrels, would it not?"

"Naturally."

"So, in reality, she was not protecting Orizaba on such occasions, but merely standing for her mother."

"Yes. I see that now, but I assure you it never impressed me in that way before."

"You heard of the man first, about five years ago. How long has he been considered a quasi member of your family?"

"Certainly for three years; in reality I have no doubt that my mother has supplied him with funds for a much longer time."

"You have not mentioned that fact before. Why, in your opinion, should she do that?"

"Heaven only knows! I know that he had no supply of money of his own. He has confessed as much to me. I have known of several occasions when he has obtained money from her. I know them only by implication, of course, but I am as certain of the facts as if I had witnessed the transactions. And I do know positively of one occasion when Mercedes gave him a thousand dollars. She said it was a loan when I upbraided her for it, but I know that he never returned it, and that he never intended to do so."

"How old a man was Orizaba?"

"He was thirty last Sunday."

"Now, Danton, pay strict attention to the next few questions."

"All right. I'm ready."

"It is impossible that Orizaba should have killed himself, is it not?"

"Absolutely so, under the circumstances, since the handle of Cadillac's needle was returned to its place."

"You are equally positive that you did not kill him?"

"Unless I did so in my sleep, and am therefore entirely unconscious of the act. I know that I did not touch him."

"And you are equally sure that he was dead? You

"...re positive that in your dazed condition you could not have been mistaken?"

"Oh, I am certain of all that."

"And that the needle that is missing from this cork handle which you have just placed in my hand, is now imbedded in the back of his neck?"

"I know that the needle was in the cork at the last moment before I left my room to go to the banquet. I know that the needle is not there now. I know that there is—or was—the mark of a wound such as that needle would have made, at the back of his neck. I know that there was a spot—a bead—of blood there, which I wiped away with a handkerchief, and that in wiping the spot I was certain that I could detect, by a pressure of my finger, the presence of the end of the needle, under the skin."

"And yet you also know that the casket in which the needle was kept by you was locked and that the only key that exists within your knowledge which will open it, was in your pocket—by the way, were your keys in your trousers or in your waistcoat?"

"In my trousers."

"And you did not remove them when you threw yourself on the couch to sleep?"

"No."

"But you admit that you were very full of wine."

"Just about as full as I could be, and walk."

"So that when you dropped asleep in that condition, any person might have gone through your pockets and removed everything you possessed without disturbing you, don't you think?"

"Yes. I hadn't thought of that, but it is as true as gospel."

"But—although you are equally positive that you locked your desk before you left the house to attend the banquet, yet you are certain that when you entered your room after having fallen asleep on the piazza and remained there approximately half an hour, you saw Ramon Orizaba standing at your open desk. Now is there a possibility that you are mixed about that part of the story? Remember, you were not sober at the time."

"Nevertheless, I do not think I am mistaken about it. Of course it is possible that I am deceived, but I do not think so."

"Now, supposing you to be correct on that point, have you any idea why Orizaba was searching your desk?"

"Not an idea in the world."

"Had he, to your knowledge, ever done such a thing as that before?"

"No; never—at least, not that I have suspected."

"Have you ever had reason to suppose that any person has opened your desk in your absence?"

"N-n-no."

"You seem to hesitate in your answer."

"Well, such a thought has never actually occurred to me before, but now that you suggest it, I am reminded that there have been several times when I have been annoyed by little things which I attributed to my own carelessness."

"Such as——"

"Such as discovering papers or letters in pigeonholes where they did not belong. Such as searching for things that were not in their proper places when I found them. I am extremely methodical about some of my habits, and it is one of my boasts that I could go to my desk at night and place my hand on anything I desired to find there."

"And yet you have occasionally found things not in their accustomed places, eh?"

"Yes."

"When was the first experience of that kind?"

"I don't remember. Two or three years ago, perhaps."

"Has it happened frequently?"

"No. Several times, I should say; but at long intervals."

"Do you keep a check-book in your desk?"

"Certainly."

"Are you as systematic and methodical concerning the stubs in your check-book, as you are about the arrangement of your desk?"

"I am afraid not."

"Now, go back to the time when you left the train

at the Fells, on your way home from the banquet. You say you have no recollection that Orizaba was with you during the walk from the station to the house?"

"None whatever."

"And yet you say that you stopped two or three times and indulged in soliloquies—held animated dialogues with the lamp posts and the telegraph poles, eh?"

"Oh, yes; there is no doubt of that."

"When you reached the piazza, and dropped into a chair there, are you sure that you were alone?"

"As sure as I am of anything at all. Everything is more or less hazy, you know."

"But half an hour later, or thereabouts, when you went to your room, Orizaba was standing at your desk which was open?"

"Yes."

"And there was no train that could have arrived from the city, in the meantime?"

"Not unless it was a special."

"Now, with your knowledge of Orizaba and his habits, of the relations he occupied in the household, of the acquaintances he cultivated, can you offer any suggestion concerning the identity of any person who might have killed him? I don't necessarily mean who did kill him, but who might have done so at any time or place?"

"Nobody but Reginald Meadows Danton—myself. The fact is, Carter, Orizaba was generally well liked. He was quite a favorite at the club. I don't know that he had an enemy in the world, save myself—and possibly my father. Only, of course, the governor is out of the question. He's in Europe, anyhow; and, besides, his dislike for Orizaba was only general. He disliked to have strangers around the house at any time. We have always entertained lavishly, but it was always a bore to the governor. Dear old dad hasn't an ambition in life that hasn't the dollar sign in front of it. You must not get the idea that because I hated and despise Orizaba, that everybody else did the same. On the contrary, he was a general favorite."

"Very well, Danton," said the detective, rising from his chair. "If you will wait here while I make some changes in my apparel, I will rejoin you presently and we will catch the six-thirty train for the Fells. For the present, I advise you to give the impression that you have not been at the house before, this morning, and if the body of Orizaba has not already been found, we will discover it. After that, we must be guided by events. My presence with you, you can explain on the plea that I am a Mr. Felix Parsons, of London, an old friend whom you unexpectedly met at the club."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PICTURE IN THE ROSE GARDEN.

Nick Carter and his young client walked from the station to the Fells, and while they were on their way, the detective took occasion to refer to another point that had been mentioned by Danton, and one to which he had especially objected at the time it was made.

"In the beginning of our conversation this morning," he said, "you used the expression that you had long 'meditated' killing Orizaba some day. Later, you told me about the needle, but I have not yet gone into that subject of meditation. I would like to know exactly what you meant by the use of that word in connection with the possible death of Ramon Orizaba."

"I don't think I meant the expression to be understood in exactly the way you took it," replied Danton. "I did not mean that I had actually meditated murdering him."

"It sounded very much like such a statement."

"Well, I will tell you how I have meditated upon his death by violence. If the consequences of committing such a deed were purely physical—if there were no moral side to the question—if the only thing that I could have outraged by the commission of such an act had been the law, I think I should have killed him long ago."

"That is an extremely dangerous sentiment for you to express under the existing circumstances, Danton."

"Oh, I know that; but that isn't the point. When I meditated upon his death, it was in the form of thinking out regrets that, because of the moral and mental aspects of the case, I was debarred from killing him.

I have wished that we might both return to savagery long enough for me to take his life without experiencing regret for the act afterward. I wanted him dead and I wanted to kill him, but I never for an instant considered the possibility that I would do so; precisely in the same ratio in which my adventurous spirit is always stirred whenever I read of an expedition to the North Pole."

"How is that?"

"Why, I meditate upon going there myself. I haven't a doubt but that I could accomplish it much more satisfactorily than Peary has ever done. I have meditated upon the accomplishment of such an expedition so many times, that I have well-defined plans for the work, and yet if the money, the men, the ships and everything were placed at my disposal in the midst of one of those meditative journeys, I would no more have undertaken it, than I would seriously have considered the cold-blooded murder that had occurred. Do you understand me?"

"Yes. I think I do. A journey to the North Pole is one of your dreams which you make use of on account of its soporific effect, when you are composing yourself to sleep; and the death of Orizaba was one of your dreams, which you used in connection with the happiness of your home life."

"Exactly."

"Then I think we understand each other."

"No, Mr. Carter. Not quite."

"Well, what else?"

"I would like to ask you a few questions."

"Ask them."

"You have assured me that you do not believe that I could have killed Orizaba in my sleep."

"I have; emphatically."

"You are certain that such a thing did not happen?"

"I feel as positive as if I knew by observation, that it did not."

"You have not assured me of your conviction that my hand did not strike that needle into his neck."

"Have I not?"

"No."

"Do you need that assurance from me?"

"I would like to have it."

"Why? Are you not satisfied on that point in your own mind?"

"Not exactly. I know that I did not do the deed knowingly; but——"

"But what?"

"This: I know what it is to do things when under the influence of liquor, and to have absolutely no recollection afterward, of having done them. I have awakened in the morning many a time, with no remembrance of places I had visited while I was intoxicated. I have met friends often, on the day succeeding some such spree, and have been told by them of incidents that took place the preceding night—incidents in which I had a part, but of which I retained absolutely no recollection."

"That is a common experience with men who drink to excess, Danton."

"Yes, I know; but here is another point connected with it. In the majority of cases of the sort I have described, a rehearsal of the incidents recalls them to mind—I remember them, or rather recall them when reminded of them; but there have been other cases where such periods have remained total blanks in my mind, and which no sort of reminder could recall to my recollection."

"That is not unusual, either."

"Well, is it possible that I might have killed Orizaba while drunk, and have totally forgotten it?"

"No. I am sure it is not possible."

"Do you mean that?"

"Certainly I mean it."

"Then you believe that I am not responsible for the death of Orizaba? I want your assurance of that, if you can give it."

"Very well, my young friend, then you have it. I believe that you are no more responsible for the death of Ramon Orizaba, than I am—unless the fact that you owned the weapon that killed him, may be said to convey responsibility. But, Danton, I am not at all sure that you did own it."

"You are not?"

"No. The needle is missing from your desk. You think you wiped away a spot of blood from the back

of his neck. You believe that the needle was imbedded in his neck at the time because you think you detected its presence there. It remains to be seen if your conclusions, arrived at when you were not in a responsible condition of mind, are correct. How do you feel now, by the way?"

"Rocky; terribly rocky and shaky."

Nick put out one hand and rested it on the shoulder of his companion.

"Danton," he said, "I feel that the very best tonic I can give you for your services, is to tell you how much I admire your conduct this morning. You have done nobly, and you have acted bravely and almost fearlessly. You have won my respect, my faith and my lasting friendship for all time, by your conduct since I found you awaiting me in the reception room at my house. Be as brave through the ordeals you will have to face, as you have been in the beginning, and take my word for it, the clouds will disappear."

Danton came to an abrupt stop, and there were tears in his eyes as he turned and faced the detective.

"You mustn't talk to me like that, old chap, don't you know," he said. "I've been up against it awful hard since I found that dead body in the chair in my room, and I can tell you right now that 'Little Reggie's wild-oats' days are over, and that's no dream."

"Good for you. I believe you are in earnest."

"In earnest? So much so that if you had told me just now that there was a possibility that I might, even unconsciously, be the murderer, I should have gone directly and given myself up, and faced the music. Thank Heaven it is not necessary."

They were ascending the long pathway which led to the side entrance of the house, and as Danton ceased speaking, he raised his arm and pointed across the lawn.

Nick turned, and his eyes encountered a vision of beauty such as never before in his life had he encountered, and the memory of which remained with him to the end of his life.

It was the month of June, it will be remembered, and a great part of the garden was given up to the cultivation of roses. There were thousands of them in bloom, from the purest white to the deep and haughty red of the jacqueminot, and they clung to low bushes and to high ones. They climbed upon trellises and peeped from interstices in the lattice work built by the gardener to support them. They hung in clusters far out of reach overhead, and they smiled up from the dew-laden leaves and grasses in the beds. Roses in all their richness, in all the magnificent and munificent glory of strength, and color and grace. Roses! Roses everywhere. And in the very midst of them, framed in nature's richest and most priceless work, dressed in a simple white morning gown with the glory of her hair glistening in the slanting sun, with her eyes sparkling irridescently and her lips parted in a smile, and with festoons of roses hanging from her shoulders and arms, encircling her neck and filling her hands, stood Mercedes, looking toward her brother and his companion.

Involuntarily Nick Carter raised his hat and bowed —to the matchless beauty of the scene more than to the young woman who completed it. And then he was conscious of a shiver that went through him like an electric shock, when he suddenly remembered the cold and silent clod of clay that was sitting so still in a chair somewhere in the house before him, whose dead eyes would never look upon this scene, whose senseless nostrils could never again expand to meet the fragrance of that June morning—that useless body which only yesterday had been as filled with hopes and longings as any person alive.

"It is your sister, is it not?" said Nick, in a low tone, to Danton.

"Yes."

"Take me to her. It is an excellent moment for me to make her acquaintance. Remember, I am a friend from England—Mr. Felix Parsons, in the diplomatic service."

She saw that they were approaching her, and waited where she was, for them to draw near, and Nick saw at a glance that she had eyes only for her brother.

He saw, too, that her smile expanded as they came nearer to her; that a look of pleased surprise came into her eyes as she studied her brother, and he knew that it was because, although he had attended a banquet and

been out all the night, he showed never a sign of the effects of it—of the wines he had drank, of the liquors he had imbibed; and then he was presented to her.

"Mercedes," said Danton, "this is an old friend and a very dear friend—Mr. Parsons. Felix, this is the best, the sweetest and the dearest sister that ever blessed a young scapegrace, in this world."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DETECTIVE'S SEARCH FOR CLEWS.

Greetings had scarcely been exchanged when they were interrupted by the appearance of young Danton's valet who approached them rapidly across the lawn, and, pausing while still some distance from them, called out in a low tone:

"May I have a word with you, Mr. Reginald?"

Danton swept one lightning-like glance upon Nick, and crossed over to where the valet was waiting.

"What is it, Rogers?" he asked.

"I had occasion to visit your rooms just now, sir," said the valet, in a low tone, which was inaudible to the others. "Mr. Orizaba is there, sir."

"Orizaba? In my rooms? How is that?" asked Danton, in well-simulated surprise.

"I do not know how it is, sir, only that he is there; but that is not all, sir."

"Well? What more?"

"He is in the big chair near the south window, sir. I supposed he was sleeping, and, knowing that you would be offended if you returned and discovered him there, I sought to awaken him, sir."

"Sought to awaken him! Why didn't you do it?"

"He would not awaken, sir?"

"What the devil do you mean, Rogers?"

"He would not wake up, because he could not, sir. He is dead."

"Dead! Good heavens! You must be mistaken!"

"He is dead, sir; and quite cold. I saw you as you approached the house, almost at the same moment that I discovered him, sir, and so I came directly to you. Will you tell me what to do next, sir?"

"Yes; send one of the stable boys for a doctor as quickly as he can go. Say that Orizaba is ill. Bring the doctor to my rooms as soon as he arrives. In the meantime, tell nobody of your discovery. I will go with my friend to my rooms at once. Go. Wait at the stable for the doctor, and then bring him to me at once."

Then, as Rogers turned away, Danton called out:

"Oh, Felix. I am going to my rooms. My man tells me that Orizaba is there, and that he is ill! Will you come with me?"

With a murmured apology to Mercedes, Nick rejoined Danton, and together they entered the house and proceeded at once to Danton's rooms.

Nick nodded his approval when Danton related the conversation that had taken place between him and his valet, but he made no comment. But when they entered and closed the door behind them, he said:

"It may prove a little bit harder for you in the end, to attempt to carry the impression now, that you were not at home early this morning, but it is decidedly better in view of my idea of what is to come. Your sister seemed to take the news that Orizaba is ill with very little concern."

"Oh, she expected that we would both be out of the counting to-day. I usually am when I have been to a banquet. She thinks his illness is only the effects of his night out, and his presence in my room due to his not being able to find his own."

"I see," said the detective—but it was evident that he had other ideas concerning Mercedes' reception of the news; however, he said nothing more on the subject, but at once busied himself in examining the room.

Orizaba's position in the chair was precisely as Danton had described it.

A rapid, but careful inspection of the back of his neck, disclosed a small blue mark, not larger than the head of a pin, where the needle had entered the flesh. Around it there was no sign whatever of a wound, and there was not a thing that could be discovered externally, to indicate that an instrument of death had entered there.

"It is too bad that I cannot go deeper into that ques-

tion here and now," said Nick, "but for obvious reasons the body must not be disturbed until after the doctor and the coroner have viewed it—and, anyhow, the body itself is the least of my concerns just now."

Suddenly he glanced up sharply at Danton, who was watching him eagerly.

"Did you have a shower in this neighborhood yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes. A light one; late in the afternoon."

"Are you wearing the shoes you wore at the banquet, or did you put on a different pair when you started to find me?"

"I changed them."

"Where are the ones you wore to the banquet?"

"Here."

"Let me see them. Ah! I thought so."

"What?"

"Never mind, just now. You think that half an hour might have elapsed while you were asleep in the piazza chair. Yes. I remember. Here is a small stain of ink on the ends of the thumb and first finger of Orizaba's right hand, as if he had used them to pick an obstruction from the point of a pen—a hair, for example. Tell me, was Orizaba left handed? Did he write with his left hand?"

"With either. With one almost as well as with the other."

"And you use purple ink on your desk, I take it, eh?"

"Yes. I do."

"Good. Where are the clothes you wore to the banquet? Get them, for we must work rapidly in order to be through before the doctor arrives."

"Here," replied Danton, and he brought them from a chair in the bedroom, where he had thrown them down carelessly.

Nick examined them carefully and then returned them to their owner.

"They are all right," he said. "Hang them, if you can, in their accustomed place, where your valet keeps them. When you have done that, come here."

Danton returned in a moment and took his place beside Nick.

"Well? he inquired.

"Look there," said Nick, pointing at the bottom of the legs of the trousers on the dead man. "Tell me what you see."

"Only a small, green burr."

"Exactly. Only a small, green burr—and on the other leg, the remnants of another small, green burr that has been picked off and thrown away. I did not find any evidence of such a thing on the trousers you wore, Danton."

"Well, I don't know, to be sure, but I don't think I went anywhere to get such things fast to me."

"Exactly; and it is evident that Orizaba did, is it not?"

"Why, yes."

"Do you remember if he drank very much last night? Was he as full as you were when you started for home?"

"I don't know. I don't think he was, however, for the reason that he generally kept his head much better than I could."

"And yet, when your sister heard that he was in your rooms, ill, you say she doubtless believed that it was because he was drunk last night. Now, you take your stand over there at the window and keep your eyes out through it, so that you can tell me the moment you see any signs of the doctor's arrival. That's it. Do not have me in mind at all, but tell me when you see anybody coming."

Danton obeyed, and as soon as his back was turned Nick Carter began to work in earnest.

One by one he examined every pocket in the clothing of the dead man, turning out the contents, examining each article and paper separately, and with careful scrutiny: and while he did so, there were several articles which he transferred to his own pockets, and that with the appearance of the utmost pleasure.

There were two letters, a check, a fountain pen, a small card case, which, however, contained no cards but was well supplied with other things, and a piece of blue blotting paper, which exactly fitted into the card case.

These he deposited in his own pockets, and then

when he had rearranged the clothing of the dead man so that there remained no evidence that anything had been disturbed, he straightened up and drew back just as Danton announced that the doctor had arrived.

It must be remembered that there was not a sign of violence anywhere upon the body of the dead man.

He was seated in the big, upholstered chair near the window, in an attitude such as a person asleep might quite naturally have assumed. His head was thrown back against the cushion, and his hands were disposed as gracefully and naturally as if he had used every artistic sense in placing them before the fatal blow had fallen upon him.

The doctor summoned by Rogers happened also to be the coroner, which was fortunate, inasmuch as he could give immediate permission for the removal of the body. He happened also, to be not particularly gifted with understanding, and to be one of those individuals who believes so thoroughly in what he does know that opposite opinions serve merely to fasten his own convictions the more firmly. Moreover, an affair of this kind in a household like the Dantons! Well! He considered it a beneficent intervention of Providence that Orizaba should have died thus suddenly in order that he might be called in and be for a moment on terms of familiarity with the multi-millionaire's family.

But Dr. Jackson, the coroner, did not return alone. He brought a younger man with him, who was also a physician, a young Dr. Pollock, whose keen, black eyes, alert manner and comprehensive attitude at once impressed Nick, so that he remarked, mentally, to himself:

"There's a young chap who will not be fooled by appearances, and who will manage to get at the bottom of this thing without much delay. I must have a private talk with him as soon as possible."

Dr. Jackson lost no time in arriving at a decision concerning the case.

"The gentleman expired four or five hours ago," he said, rubbing his hands together as if he were imparting information of the most delightful character, calculated to give unalloyed pleasure to everybody within the sound of his voice. "Overindulgence in stimulants brought about his death, I have no doubt. However, the autopsy will fully determine that part of it. There is, no doubt, however, that the valves of the heart will be found to be greatly enlarged, and—er—badly—er—congested. Your friend—or was he a relative, Mr. Danton? I think I have heard that he was a cousin. Yes? Very well, your cousin's death is due to heart failure, sir, superinduced by overexcitement and stimulant, followed by the sudden relaxation of falling asleep in this chair. Ahem! I think he may now be removed."

CHAPTER VIII.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE WHICH MIGHT HAVE HANGED DANTON.

It was at this juncture that Nick called Dr. Pollock aside for a moment.

"Doctor," he said, "I would appreciate it if you would consent to do me a small favor in this matter."

"Very well, sir, what can I do?" replied the doctor.

"I wish you would appear to accept whatever verdict Dr. Jackston sees fit to give concerning the events that have happened here this morning, and that when he takes his departure you would ride away with him—but that you would return almost immediately, if you can do so."

"That is rather a strange request, is it not, sir?"

"Perhaps; but I have good reasons for making it, as you will discover later."

"It would be scarcely a professional act on my part, sir."

"Then call it the act of an expert. Dr. Pollock, I must be frank with you and rely upon your discretion also. I am not Mr. Parsons at all. I am a person of whom you have no doubt heard, a detective, named Nick Carter."

"Indeed! Yes, sir, I have heard of you and I am glad to make your acquaintance. I will also be glad to serve you if you will tell me how I may do so."

"In the first place, doctor, Ramon Orizaba was murdered. I have already discovered that much, but for

important reasons I wish particularly that you should have the credit of the discovery."

"Murdered! There is absolutely no outward evidence of a crime."

"No; but I can show you much that will convince you; therefore will you do as I have requested?"

"Certainly I will."

"Then in an hour if you will meet me in the room to which they are taking the body, I will talk with you there."

"Very good; I will be there."

Turning from the doctor, Nick motioned for young Danton to come to him.

"The servants already know that Orizaba is dead," he said, rapidly. "I think you had best carry the information to your mother yourself. Tell her only what the valet told you and what the doctor has said since he arrived. That will be enough for the present. I will take it upon myself to go into the rose garden and break the news to your sister. Conduct yourself throughout exactly as you have done up to the present moment—if you think you can keep up under this awful strain."

"I must keep up. There is no choice."

"True. But don't drop down in your tracks. Once in a while you look as if you were about to do that very thing."

"I feel so, too. But I manage to pull myself together. If I drop, it will be because I am a dead one—like Orizaba."

"Keep up your courage. Go to your mother, and when you have finished with her, follow me to the rose garden where we left your sister. I remember that she said she had taken her coffee, and that after she had filled her lungs with the breath of the roses, she should sit under the arbor and read, so I have no doubt that I will find her there."

And so while the servants, directed by the two doctors, were conveying all that was left of Ramon Orizaba to the rooms he had occupied in life, Reginald Danton sought the apartment of his mother, and Nick Carter went out of the house through the side door and started along the gravel walk toward the arbor where Mercedes had told him she would sit and read.

He crossed the lawn and passed among the wealth of roses toward the very spot where he had been presented to her; and there, where she had stood during the two or three moments they had conversed together, the ground was littered with the roses she had carried in her arms and upon her person; and from that spot toward the arbor, fifty feet away, there was a trail of roses and rose leaves in such proficiency as almost to suggest that she had played the game of hare and hounds with them, in order to lead her pursuer on her retreat.

He followed quickly, for there was something about that confused littering of the flowers along the path way which suggested haste and excitement. He could almost imagine that she had flung them there in her excitement as she turned to fly from some real or fancied peril. The roses along the walk seemed to speak to him and to bid him hasten to her side, and he lost no time in making his way to the arbor.

At the entrance he halted abruptly.

Inside that rose-embowered place, screened effectually from view from the outside, Mercedes had fallen, and she was stretched at full length upon the ground, her face now waxen in hue was turned toward the canopy of roses over her, and her whole attitude told him that she had fainted the instant she crossed the threshold and knew that she had escaped from the view of others.

"Poor child," murmured Nick, bending over her, and he began to chafe her hands and to wait patiently until nature should come to his assistance and revive her, for it was not at all to his purposes that he should call for assistance or seek restoratives, and thus betray a weakness which she had sought so strenuously to hide.

While he bent above her, and stroking her hands looked down upon her exquisitely beautiful face, vaguely wondering that creation could have wrought so perfectly upon one human being, a shadow fell across them both, and raising his eyes, he saw that Danton had followed him into the garden.

"What has happened to Mercedes?" he demanded, instantly falling upon his knees beside his sister.

"She has fainted, that is all," replied Nick. "How is it that you are here?"

"My mother was already informed, it seems. She sent me to bring Mercedes to her."

"Ah! Well, your sister is already reviving. It will be better, when she opens her eyes, that she should not discover a stranger. I will step to one side, out of her range of vision. When she is sufficiently recovered, you can break the news of Orizaba's death to her."

Nick passed outside the arbor, but he stood where he could not only observe, but also hear all that took place between brother and sister, and, for reasons of his own, the circumstance was one which entirely accorded with his wishes.

"Mercedes," said Danton, in a low, eager tone. "It is I—Med."

She sighed and seemed to make an effort to smile, but it was a failure.

"I fainted, did I not?" she whispered.

"Yes, dear. I think so. Why did you faint? What was the matter? You looked so well when I saw you in the garden only a little while ago. What happened to you, Mercedes?"

"Did I look well? Did I look happy? Oh, Meadows! How can you say that?"

"Why, what is the matter, child-sister? Why do you look so frightened? Your eyes——"

"Hush, hush! Tell me what the doctor said. What did he say?"

"That is what I came here to tell you, Mercedes. Ramon is—dead."

Not a trace of surprise manifested itself in her face as she looked up into her brother's eyes. Then she slowly raised herself to her elbow, thence to a sitting posture, and thus she leaned against the rustic bench, still looking into her brother's eyes.

"Did the doctor find—does the doctor know—did he discover what it was—that killed—Ramon?" she asked hesitatingly.

"Why, yes," replied Danton. "He said that death was due to heart failure."

"Thank God!"

"Why, Mercedes, what do you mean?"

"What do I mean? You ask me that?"

"Do you mean to tell me——"

"Hush, my brother. Did you think I did not know?"

"Know what, Mercedes?"

"That Ramon was dead. Did you think I did not know? Oh, my God! I wish that I might have died a thousand times before I did know—before I saw what I did see."

"Good heaven! Mercedes, tell me what you mean!"

"Hush, Reginald. I have never called you by that name before, have I? But it seems as if I could never again address you by the name I have loved to use. Oh, my brother, my brother, why did you not kill me also, instead of condemning me to live on, with this horrible secret in my keeping? Instead of forcing me to be the one person in all the world who knows that you have committed a—murder! Oh, God help me!"

Young Danton started back in terror, and his sister buried her face in her arms against the rustic bench and burst into a passion of sobs.

But the young man pulled himself together wonderfully well, and he forced himself to ask quite calmly:

"Mercedes, I have feared that you would fear that I had a hand in the death of Orizaba, but somehow I had disabused my mind of that fear so utterly that I had, for the moment, forgotten it. Do you mean to say that you think I killed him?"

"I know that you killed him, Reginald."

"You—know—that—I—killed—him? Good God, Mercedes, what do you mean? How can you know a thing which is not true?"

"I saw you."

Danton started back with a cry that seemed to him loud enough to have reached to the river, but which in reality was scarcely heard by the detective a few feet away, and then he stood there as if paralyzed, staring into the face of his sister with glassy, unseeing

eyes. "You saw me!" he whispered, thrilly. "Then it is true after all. I did it without knowing that I did it, and all the assurances given me by Mr. Carter were wrong. I did it, you say, and you saw me. Oh, God! Oh, God! I did it after all, and I did it without knowing it!"

Mercedes raised her eyes again and fixed them coldly upon her brother.

"Reginald," she said, slowly, "you are dearer to me than anybody in all the world, and I will keep your secret so well that all the tortures in the world shall never draw it from me—so well that the keeping of it will kill me, for I feel as if I were dying even now; but, Reginald, do not think that I shall hold you guiltless. Do not suppose that I can be made to believe that you did not commit that awful deed with deliberation and after full premeditation. I saw you, I say. I saw every motion that you made, everything you did."

"Tell me what you saw," he said, slowly.

"You did not lock the door when you entered the room, and a draught had swung it partly ajar. I stood in the hallway. I saw you approach the chair in which Ramon was seated asleep. You held a bottle in your hand, and I saw you hold it under his nostrils so that he might inhale the fumes of whatever it contained—and then I became conscious of the odor of chloroform."

"But there is no chloroform in the room. I have never in my life had chloroform in my possession," groaned Danton, whose only thought then was to convince himself that his sister might be mistaken. Still she paid no heed to what he said.

"Wait," she said. "I saw you hold the chloroform under his nose. Then you crossed the room to your desk. You found the casket and opened it, and I knew then what you were going to do. I tried to cry out. I tried to rush into the room, but I could neither speak nor move. All power of sound and motion had been taken from me. I was as a dead body, standing there, chained, compelled to witness the most terrible sight my eyes ever beheld—the taking of my own brother. You opened the casket and you took from it that terrible instrument you have shown to me. I recognized it by the cork handle, and again I tried to call out to you and stop you—but I could not make a sound. I could not move."

"And then——" asked Danton, tensely.

"Then? Then you passed behind the chair in which he was seated; you pushed his head forward until his chin rested upon his breast, for the chloroform had stupefied him so that there was no fear that he would awaken; and then, while you held his head forward with your left hand, you did something with your right, and I saw a shudder like a spasm shoot through Ramon's figure—and I knew that you had killed him, even as that terrible man, Cadillac, had murdered his victims in Paris."

She broke out into sobbing again, and he made no effort to stop her; presently she recovered sufficiently to continue.

"I would not have cried out then if I could have done so," she said, "for it was too late. I knew that Ramon was dead. I saw you replace his head back against the cushion of the chair. I saw that you smoothed his coat, as if to obliterate any traces you might have left there of the crime you had committed. I saw you hold up the cork handle of the instrument you had used, and I saw that it was empty—that the terrible needle was gone from it. I saw you take it back to the desk and drop it again into the casket where you kept it, and then I fled to my room, entered it, locked the door, and fell into a swoon from which I did not recover until the sun was shining into my room. Then I dressed and came out here. I strolled myself to act the part you saw me play, but when you went into the house, taking your friend with you to visit the scene of your crime, it was too much for me. I ran here to the arbor, and then—then I opened my eyes and found you beside me."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARK ON THE CORPSE.

Mercedes Danton was not only herself convinced that her brother was a murderer, but she had convinced him of his own guilt. Doubtful at first, and yet half

believing that he might have unconsciously committed the act which deprived Ramon Orizaba of life, and later, aided by the reasoning of the detective, assured that he could not have killed him without knowing it, he was now thrown back into a worse condition of mind than ever, for here was one—his own beloved and loving sister—who saw him do the deed.

When she ceased speaking, his mind seemed to drift into a stupor from which he was aroused a moment later by feeling a heavy hand on his shoulder.

It was Nick Carter who touched him, and Mercedes discovered the presence of "Mr. Parsons" at the same instant.

She leaped to her feet and confronted him with flashing eyes, for sorrow gave place to anger, and all the maternal instinct of woman, which is aroused quite as thoroughly in the heart of a sister when she is fighting for a brother as for a mother when she fights for a child—all that wonderful fighting and enduring quality with which God has endowed womankind, rose up within her to battle against the peril in which she believed her brother stood at that instant when his secret became the property of a third person.

"You heard me!" she gasped. "You heard everything that I said?"

"Yes," said Nick. "I heard everything;" but the kindly look in his eyes and the subdued voice in which he spoke convinced her that, at least, he was not immediately to be feared, and she sank back upon the bench and buried her face in her hands again.

Suddenly she raised her head and with a quick motion leaned toward him.

"You—you knew about it—before," she whispered, tentatively.

"Yes," he replied. "I thought I did. Now I am sure that I did."

"Then—you saw—I mean—he did not chloroform you—— Ah! You were not unconscious. You saw—the things—that I have—described. You—saw—them—yourself!"

"Mercedes," interrupted Danton, "are you mad? What do you mean, sister?"

"Wait," said Nick, sternly. "Sit over there beside your sister, Danton, and whatever is said, don't you speak at all. Your sister saw much more than she has described, as you will presently discover. It is a fortunate thing that I overheard this conversation between you, for through its revelations we will get at the truth. Sit down, Danton, and wait."

Then he turned to Mercedes.

"Miss Danton," he said, kindly, "you are overwrought, but you are brave, and tender, and true. You love your brother, even though now you believe him to be guilty of a horrible crime—even though you believe it on the evidence of your own senses, than which, it would seem there could be no better. But yet, there are times when our own senses deceive us most outrageously, as I shall presently prove to you. Yours have deceived you. You saw that murder committed, and you were paralyzed with terror at the spectacle. Has it occurred to you that your perceptions might have been dulled, or have become distorted by reason of the same terrors?"

She shook her head in a slow negative.

"Yet," continued Nick, "I will presently prove to you that you know positively that your brother did not commit that act."

"Oh, sir, if you only can. But it is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible. Things are only improbable. This one is not even an improbability. Now, follow me closely. When we—your brother and I—entered the rose garden an hour ago, and I was presented to you, where did you honestly think we had come from?"

"I did not know. I had no thought about it save that you had been out somewhere together: but I thought I understood the reason for that."

"Precisely. You mean that you supposed that we had gone out of this house together this morning, do you not?"

"Certainly."

"It did not occur to you that I had just come from New York, and, in fact, had never set foot upon this estate before?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I knew better than that. I beg, sir, that you will not attempt to deceive me. I will appreciate everything you would do for my bother, but do not think that I can be deceived."

"I think you have been deceived and now I am endeavoring to set you right. You say you knew that I had not just come here from New York. Tell me exactly why you think you knew that."

"Because I saw you before."

"Ah! Now, are you sure that it was I whom you saw? Did you see me sufficiently plainly to identify me?"

"Certainly. I did not see your face; but it could have been nobody else whom I saw."

"You think so? We will see. For I understand now exactly how you have made an awful mistake. Was it on the couch in your brother's room where you think you saw me? No, let me put the question differently: When you were looking into that room through the half-open door, and saw the terrible scene you have just described, were you conscious that there was a person—a third person in that room?"

"Yes."

"And where was that third person?"

"Stretched upon the couch, apparently sleeping."

"And when you saw me in the garden with your brother a little while ago, you naturally supposed that I was the same person you had seen asleep on the couch in your brother's room? Is that it?"

"Yes; but there is also another reason."

"Indeed, what is that?"

"I know that there were three persons who came into the house some time after midnight, and I know that those three persons went to my brother's room."

"Excellent. Now we are getting at it. How did you know that?"

"I saw them from my window."

"Describe them as you saw them."

"My brother came up the walk first, and alone. I think he must have stopped on the piazza, for I did not hear him come up the stairs, although I listened."

"Well? and what next?"

"Soon after that I saw Ramon Orizaba and a stranger approach the house together. That stranger I now suppose to be yourself."

"Precisely. And did you again listen to discover if they came up the stairs?"

"Yes. I thought that all three came up together and went into the room."

"Now, what was it that called you from your room, so that you happened to be passing your brother's door at the moment when the sights you saw within held your attention?"

"Nothing at all. I was merely restless. I knew from his manner of walking that my brother was intoxicated. I also saw that Ramon Orizaba was in a condition that was not much better, and I naturally supposed the same thing of the third person. I knew they had gone into my brother's rooms, and I wished to assure myself that they were not quarreling."

"Now tell me what was the first discovery you made inside your brother's room. What was the very first thing you saw which attracted your attention?"

"I saw him. He was standing at the couch with his back toward me, and he was leaning over the person who was lying on the couch—yourself."

"We will say that it was I, for the present, if it pleases you, although I was at that time in my own bed in the city of New York. Now what was your brother doing?"

"I did not know. He had a bottle in his hand—an ordinary four-ounce phial."

"The bottle which you afterward supposed contained chloroform?"

"Yes."

"And your supposition was that he had been administering it to the person who was lying on the couch?"

"In the light of what I saw subsequently—yes."

"Now, when he turned away from the man on the couch, did you see his face plainly? I want you to be sure about this. You say it was your brother; I want to know if you saw your brother's face and recognized it."

"I did not see it plainly; no."

"Was not the room lighted?"

"Very dimly. There was only one [illegible]

light turned on, and that was in the adjoining room out in that one."

Nick turned to Danton.

"I believe you assured me that all the lights were turned on when you awoke. Are you certain about that?"

"Absolutely positive," was the quick reply, for Danton was now leaning forward in intense excitement, since he had caught the drift of Nick Carter's questions.

The detective turned again to Mercedes.

"The light was, then, very dim," he said. "Now, if you could not see the man's face clearly, can you give me any good reason for believing that it was your brother whom you saw with the bottle in his hand?"

"Only that I felt positive that it was my brother," said Mercedes, now beginning to stare in amazement, for she also was beginning to understand.

"Did this man whom you saw wear a coat?" asked Nick.

"Yes. He was fully dressed."

"Was it a dress coat?"

"No. I do not think so. I remember thinking afterward that Reginald must have changed his coat and waistcoat after entering the house, for I noticed when he came up the walk that he wore a low, white waistcoat and his dress suit. When I saw him with the bottle in his hand—or the person whom I did see with a bottle in his hand, wore an ordinary coat and a dark vest."

"Like what Reginald is wearing now?"

"No. Dark. Quite dark. Almost black, or quite so in that light."

"When he turned away from the man on the couch, and he at once approach the man in the chair—Orizaba?"

"Yes."

"And during all the time you were there at the door, while the man whom you supposed to be your brother was using the chloroform and the needle while he was murdering Orizaba—could you still see the third man, on the couch?"

"Certainly."

"Then, Miss Danton, your brother is guiltless, for Reginald Danton was unconscious, on the couch, when the murder was committed."

CHAPTER X.

THE VICTIM OF A NEMESIS.

Mercedes started to her feet with a cry of amazed delight, nor was Reginald's joy less deep, although he remained quite still in his place on the bench. It was Mercedes who spoke first after the announcement made by the detective.

"Then who was it whom I saw and believed to be my brother?" she demanded.

"Ah!" said the detective, "that is another matter. I think, however, that we will experience very little difficulty in determining that question, when once I have had access to the *lares* and *penates* in the room of Ramon Orizaba. However, I see Dr. Pollock returning, and so I will leave you two together, with the injunction that you had better go to your mother as soon as convenient. And, Danton, within a few hours it must be generally known that your guest was murdered, so I would suggest that you prepare your mother for the intelligence. In fact, I wish you would tell her at once, for it is more than likely that I will find it necessary to talk the matter over with her soon. Now, just one more suggestion. I think you owe it to your sister to tell her everything that has occurred, just as you told it to me, and to add to the telling all that has taken place since you entered my house this morning. You may also tell her who I am, and why I am here."

The detective left them then and hurried across the lawn to meet the doctor who had returned according to his promise, and together they repaired at once to the room where the body of Ramon Orizaba had been taken and the rooms he had occupied always when he was a guest at Linden Falls.

"Doctor," said Nick, when they were alone together in the room and had closed and bolted the door behind them, "I have asked this favor of you for two reasons. One is because I want a quiet, reliable wit-

aces to all that happens and to support every discovery I may make, and the other is because I require your professional services as an expert. The undertakers will be here shortly, and we will then have to turn the body over to them, but, in the meantime, we can easily complete such researches as it is necessary to make.

"You will find, to begin with, that this man was killed by a needle which was thrust into the back of his neck. Come; we will turn the body over and search for it, and I will ask you to withdraw it for use as evidence. There is the only mark left by the wound. It is scarcely perceptible, is it?"

"No. I should not have seen it at all if you had not drawn my attention to it."

"Will you extract the needle? The broken end must be quite close to the surface of the skin."

"Are you sure it is there?"

"Positive."

"Just beneath the skin?"

"Yes; but be careful; it is of glass and will break easily."

There was a moment of silence, and then the doctor, who stood with his back to the detective, spoke.

"You say the needle is of glass?"

"I have reason to believe it is."

"Well, you are mistaken. It is of steel."

"Steel? Let me see it."

The doctor passed the tiny weapon to the detective who examined it critically, and then, after carefully wrapping it in paper, deposited it inside his own card-case. But he did not hesitate to express his surprise to the physician at the discovery, for the needle extracted from the neck of the murdered man was in reality, a needle—a three-sided, sharp-pointed needle such as is used by furriers; in fact—to give it its true colonial name—a fur needle.

"A dangerous weapon," said the doctor.

"Dangerous, indeed," assented Nick. "Now, doctor, if you will proceed with your examination from the professional standpoint, so that you will be prepared to give your testimony in detail at the proper time and place, I will give my attention to the other things in the room."

From that time on the two men worked together in silence, only occasionally calling the attention of each other to some discovery that was pertinent to the occasion.

And Nick's investigation of the desk and its contents, of the bureau and of every nook and cranny of the room itself, was eminently satisfactory—so satisfactory, in fact, that when at last he had completed his researches, and discovered that the doctor was also done with his part of the work, he said to him:

"Here, doctor, is quite a remarkable circumstance—one, in fact, that is entirely unique in my experience, for I find by this correspondence that I have examined, that this dead man has been, during his life, in constant correspondence with a person whom he believed would some day murder him—as he has done—and more than that, that he has even lived in close juxtaposition with the would-be murderer, for a period which, according to the letters, covers almost ten years. But the remarkable part of it is, that, although he has lived close to his Nemesis, and, although he has corresponded constantly with him, he has, in all that time had no idea of the identity of his enemy."

"Do you mean that the murderer lives here in this house?" asked the doctor.

"I mean that the murderer lived here in this house; but, unless I am greatly mistaken, the murderer has fled before this."

"You know, then, who is the murderer?"

"Yes. I know exactly. Have you finished with your work?"

"Yes."

"Come, then. Let us go. I will ask you to join me in a family gathering for a little while; after that, we will each turn our testimony over to the proper officials, and I think there will be little or no trouble in apprehending the assassin."

Ten minutes later, in the library of the house, behind closed doors, Nick Carter stood in the center of the room facing Mercedes, Reginald and their mother. Beside him was seated the doctor, and upon the table

before him were placed the articles he had collected during his morning's work—the things he had taken from the pockets of the dead man, and the effects and letters he had discovered in Orizaba's room.

"Mrs. Danton," he began, "I feel that I should address my remarks to you. You have been told, have you not, of the terrible thing that has happened in your home?"

She bowed her head in the affirmative. She felt too much emotion to trust herself to speak.

"Reginald," continued Nick, "I have occupied the few moments while I waited for you to bring your mother and sister to this room, in telephoning to New York, for I find that your valet, Rogers, has started for the city without your leave. Ladies, and you, Reginald, the valet whom you have known as Orin Rogers, is the murderer of Ramon Orizaba—at least, I am sufficiently satisfied of the correctness of that statement to have telephoned to police headquarters for his arrest. Presumably he will be met at the station when he arrives in the city, but if he is not, I think I shall have no difficulty in finding him later."

"Rogers! My man, Rogers?" exclaimed Reginald.

"Yes. Has it ever occurred to you that Rogers was above his station?"

"Often. He was remarkably well educated for a man in such a position."

"He occupied several positions; among them, he represented himself as an agent for an enemy of Orizaba's. Rogers was evidently clever at disguises, for in his room, which I found time to visit for a moment, there was, in addition to a half-filled bottle of colodion, a very good supply of wigs, pigments and other necessaries for manufacturing disguises. Do you remember when Rogers came to you this morning in the rose garden, and told you that Orizaba was dead?"

"Perfectly."

"I noticed then that the soles of his boots were stained with clay—a kind of blue clay unlike anything I saw during our walk together from the station this morning—which also assured me was the route by which you returned to the house from the banquet."

"It was the route."

"Do you remember that I asked you if there had been a shower here in the afternoon or yesterday? I wished to know if the clay had been softened sufficiently to make those stains. In discovering the stains upon the boots of Rogers, I paid no attention to them, more than to observe that they were there; but when I saw stains exactly like them on the boots of the murdered man, I was interested. Also, the discovery of the burrs upon his clothing, to which I called your attention, brought to mind the fact that I had seen, also without heeding them at the time, marks of the same sort of burrs on the trousers of your valet, when he came to you in the garden, so when I sent you to your mother, and before going in search of your sister myself, I found Rogers' room and looked through it.

"I was already satisfied that Rogers was the murderer when I talked with you and your sister in the arbor, but I chose to say nothing of the fact at that time. Now, I have additional proof. You will remember that I asked you if you used purple ink on your desk?"

"Yes."

"There were stains of purple ink in the thumb and finger of Orizaba's right hand. I asked you if he wrote with his left hand and you replied that he used both. Let me tell you now that he has used his left hand to rob you, systematically, for a long time. You have been careless with your check book and with your balances, so you have not discovered the fact, but here is a check he drew on your desk last night—a check for a much larger amount than he has ever dared to take before, doubtless, since the drawing of it made his hand tremble so that he spoiled the signature and was obliged to draw a second one. The second one is perfect. I found it in your valet's room, where he dropped it by mistake, showing that it was given to him, that both were drawn for him, that he was in the room with Orizaba at the time they were drawn—in short, that he was the third person whom your sister saw and believed to be you. Moreover, he is of your height and build, and in one of the drawers of his bureau there is a false mustache exactly like yours, which is still soft from recent use; so that it is not strange that your sister believed she saw you in the dim light. The lights, by the way, he turned off for the purposes of his work, and then turned on again when that work was done and he was ready to depart, in order that you might not see the difference and wonder at it. Also, while upon this subject, a trivial matter, but one of interest, in connection with the

checks, is the fact that the ink inside Orizaba's fountain pen is black. Also, Orizaba carried a key which fits your desk and another which fits the casket.

"Also, like all expert forgers, he carried his own blotter with him. Fortunately in this case it was one that he had not used before, and bears a very good impression of the two signatures he signed last night.

"Now, in Orizaba's room I found many letters which partially explain these mysteries; but only partially. We will have to conjecture for the rest. At sometime in the career of Orizaba, he has married and deserted a woman who died in misery and want, and since that time he has been pursued by a Nemesis in the shape of her brother who has taken a vengeance that is truly Satanic, for he has held over Orizaba's head all these years—ten of them—the threat of imminent death, and, what is still more remarkable, he has during that time, managed to extort money from his victim while he has himself remained so darkly in the background that Orizaba has never once guessed his identity.

"Of the occurrences of last night—or, rather of early this morning, I can only surmise, but either by appointment, or because the man was awaiting him, he encountered the man who he believed to be the agent of his Nemesis, between the station and this house. They walked away in another direction, and so got the clay on their shoes. That agent was Rogers, but so cleverly disguised that Orizaba did not recognize him—probably the agent was so familiar to him that he never thought of connecting him with Rogers, having known him a much longer time.

"When they met last night, Rogers was insistent for a larger amount of money than usual, and finally accompanied Orizaba to your rooms. Orizaba was at your desk preparing to draw the check when you entered the room. Rogers was here also, for they believed you were asleep in a chair on the piazza. When you entered, Rogers concealed himself, and he remained concealed until you had composed yourself to sleep on the couch. Then, he chloroformed you and the proceedings continued. Rogers then took his check and went out, and Orizaba, overcome by all that had happened, dropped asleep in the chair.

"Presently, for some reason, Rogers returned. Doubtless he had intended to kill Orizaba, last night, after the encounter on the road. He administered more chloroform to you, on the couch, and then performed the remainder of the ceremony as your sister has described it to us, for she saw it.

"And now, Reginald, there is just one point about which I am at fault, but which I think this letter will possibly explain. I found it in Rogers' room, addressed to you, and I have not yet broken the seal. Before I do so, I will explain the point to which I referred.

"Your Cadillac needle was not the instrument which killed Orizaba. He was killed with a steel needle—a furrier's needle—but, the cork handle of your glass needle was used to press it into the flesh. The glass needle was removed and the steel one substituted for it, but why I do not know. Let us see now if this letter will inform us. Listen:"

Nick broke the seal, spread the letter open before him, and read aloud:

"MR. DANTON: Although I have killed Ramon Orizaba, deliberately, and after waiting ten years, and in the meanwhile gloating over the prospect of doing so, I am not sufficiently a scoundrel to leave you to pay the penalty of my crime. I have thought of many ways of putting him out of the way, and your Cadillac needle has suggested the best one. But I am afraid that the glass is not strong enough, so I have substituted one of steel. At first I thought it might not be discovered that he was killed and that his death would be attributed to natural causes, but I will not take that chance with your life and reputation in the balance, so I write this.

"Why I have killed him does not matter to you. It will say nothing which will lead to my apprehension, and all the detectives in the world cannot find me or take me.

"I was obliged to use the cork handle of your needle in order to be successful—in order to push the weapon into his neck. You will find the glass one under the vase on the mantle in my room. ROGERS."

"Brief and to the point," said Nick, putting down the letter; and as he did so, Mercedes rose in her place and crossed the room to him, extending both hands.

"You have been our savior," she said; "my savior as well as Reginald's. God bless you!"

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 389, will contain "Mercedes Danton's Double; or, A Plot for Many Millions."

This story will show how a well-organized attempt was made to wipe out the Danton family and how Nick Carter thwarted it.

Young Rough Rider Weekly

DON'T READ IT if you don't want to keep on reading it, for you will find it a habit easily formed. You will find in these stories something new. They are entirely different from any western stories you have ever read, for they contain real, live American boys such as you meet every day, and show you what actual life on the cattle ranges is like. They have plenty of real excitement, cattle herding, broncho busting, etc., and plenty of fun and human interest : : : : : :

1. Ted Strong's Rough Riders; or, The Boys of Black Mountain
2. Ted Strong's Friends; or, The Trial of Ben Tremont
3. Ted Strong's War Path; or, The Secret of the Red Cliffs
4. Ted Strong's Stratagem; or, Saving a Boy's Honor
5. Ted Strong's Ride For Life; or, Caught in the Circle
6. Ted Strong on The Trail; or, The Cattle Men of Salt Licks
7. Ted Strong in Montana; or, Trouble at the Blackfoot Agency
8. Ted Strong's Nerve; or, Wild West Sport at Black Mountain
9. Ted Strong's Rival; or, The Cowboys of Sunset Ranch
10. Ted Strong's Peril; or, Saved by a Girl
11. Ted Strong's Gold Mine; or, The Duel at Rocky Ford
12. Ted Strong's Law Suit; or, Right Against Might

FIVE CENTS AT ALL NEWSDEALERS, OR FROM

STREET & SMITH, 238 William Street, New York.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

The Best Detective Stories in the World

354—Nick Carter from Peril to Peril; or, The Crime of the Stagecoach.
355—Nick Carter Hemmed in by Enemies; or, Where Mystery Followed Mystery.
356—Nick Carter and the Yellow Spider's Web; or, 'Frisco's Most Sensational Case.
357—Nick Carter in a Finish Fight; or, Hunting Down the Mining Swindlers.
358—Nick Carter and the Triple Identity; or, Unraveling Mystery "47."
359—Nick Carter and the Queen of Diamonds; or, The Turns of Fortune's Wheel.
360—Nick Carter and the Missing Jewels; or, A Tale of Uncertain Clews.
361—Nick Carter's Great Success; or, The Hunting Down of Insurance Frauds.
362—Nick Carter's Search for a Motive; or, Why Mission Mike was Murdered.
363—Nick Carter's Double Capture; or, Seeking the Banker's Assassins.
364—Nick Carter's Capture of the Jenkins Brothers; or, The Whereabouts of Mr. Morton.
365—Nick Carter's Three Perils; or, A Story of Hypnotic Power.
366—Nick Carter in the Hidden Chamber; or, The Hunt for the Lost Millionaire.
367—Nick Carter's Suicide Mystery; or, Playing a Master Stroke.
368—Nick Carter and the Grave Vandals; or, The Mystery of St. Paul's Church.
369—Nick Carter and the Nebraska Outlaws; or, Playing a Desperate Game.
370—Nick Carter's Diamond Trail; or, The Pursuit of the Lucky Clew.
371—Nick Carter's Man Trap; or, Trailing the Lost Boy.
372—Dazaar, the Arch Fiend; or, The House of the Seven Devils.
373—The Queen of the Seven; or, Nick Carter and the Beautiful Sorceress.
374—The Sign of the Dagger; or, The Crime Without a Name.
375—The Devil Worshipers; or, The Defiance of Dazaar.
376—The Cross of Daggers; or, In the Lair of the Devil Worshipers.
377—The Last of the Seven; or, The Confessions of Dazaar.
378—Ten-Ichi, the Wonderful; or, Nick Carter's Greatest Find.
379—The Mystery of the Mikado; or, Nick Carter in Japan.
380—An Emperor at Bay; or, Nick Carter Defies the Czar.
381—The Crime Behind the Throne; or, Nick Carter and the Palace Mystery.
382—Holding Up a Nation; or, The Little Giant Rules the World.
383—Kidnaped in Broad Daylight; or, Nick Carter on His Own Trail.
384—The Little Giant's Double; or, The World's Two Strongest Men.
385—The Secret Order of Associated Crooks; or, The Confederated Criminal Trust.
386—When Aces Were Trumps; or, A Hard Game to Play.
387—The Gambler's Last Hand; or, The Little Giant Wins Out.
388—The Murder at Linden Falls; or, The Mystery of the Cadillac Needle.
389—Mercedes Danton's Double; or, A Plot for Many Millions.

All of the above numbers always on hand. If you cannot get them from your newsdealer, five cents will bring them to you by mail, postpaid.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 238 William St., NEW YORK

BRAVE AND BOLD WEEKLY

Contains Biggest and Best Stories of All Descriptions.
A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EACH WEEK.

49—The Boy Wonder; or, Dick Gray's Marvelous Pump. By Matt Royal.
50—Labor's Young Champion; or, The Great Mill Strike. By the author of "A Lad of Steel."
51—Into Unknown Lands; or, The Secret of the Enchanted Diamond. By Cornelius Shea.
52—Two Brave Chums; or, The Outlaws of Blackwater Gap. By the author of "Dick Hazel, Explorer."
53—The Crimson Cross; or, The Mystery of His Birth. By Bernard Maxwell.
54—Dean Dunham; or, The Waterford Mystery. By Horatio Alger, Jr.
55—Among Russian Nihilists; or, The Great Assassination Plot. By Jacques Simon.
56—The Boat Club; or, The Bunkers of Rippleton. By Oliver Optic.
57—Ned Newton; or, The Fortunes of a New York Bootblack. By Horatio Alger, Jr.
58—The Erie Train Boy. By Horatio Alger, Jr.
59—Paul, the Peddler; or, The Fortunes of a Young Street Merchant. By Horatio Alger, Jr.
60—The Five-Hundred-Dollar Check; or, Jacob Marlow's Secret. By Horatio Alger, Jr.
61—Backed by an Unknown; or, Dick Darrell's Hustle for a Living. By Cornelius Shea.
62—All Aboard; or, Life on the Lake. By Oliver Optic.
63—Phil, the Fiddler; or, The Story of a Young Street Musician. By Horatio Alger, Jr.
64—Dick Halladay's Pranks; or, Fun at Strykerville Academy. By W. L. James, Jr.
65—Slow and Sure; or, From the Street to the Shop. By Horatio Alger, Jr.
66—Little by Little; or, The Cruise of the *Flyaway*. By Oliver Optic.
67—Beyond the Frozen Seas; or, The Land of the Pigmies. By Cornelius Shea.
68—The Young Acrobat; or, The Great North American Circus. By Horatio Alger, Jr.
69—Saved from the Gallows; or, The Rescue of Charlie Armitage. By Matt Royal.
70—Checkmated by a Cadet ;or, Conquered by Chance. By Harrie Irving Hancock.
71—Nuggets and Nerve; or, The Two Boy Miners. By Frank Sheridan.
72—Mile-a-Minute Tom; or, The Young Engineer of Pine Valley. By Cornelius Shea.
73—Seared With Iron; or, The Band of Skeleton Bar. By Cornelius Shea.
74—The Deuce and the King of Diamonds; or, Two Southern Boys in South Africa. By the author of "Among the Malays."
75—Now or Never; or, The Adventures of Bobby Bright. By Oliver Optic.
76—Blue-Blooded Ben; or, Two Princeton Pals. By the author of "Hal Larkin."
77—Checkered Trails; or, Under the Palmettoes. By Marline Manley.
78—Figures and Faith; or, Messenger Clinton's Chance. By the author of "The Hero of Ticonderoga."

All of the above numbers always on hand. If you cannot get them from your newsdealer, five cents per copy will bring them to you by mail, postpaid.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 238 William St., NEW YORK

STORIES OF THE REVOLUTION

Such as you are interested in are contained in the new . . . . . .

BOYS OF LIBERTY LIBRARY

These books are written by well-known authors, published in well bound paper editions, and are

The Best Historical Stories for Boys on the Market

If you are interested in the early history of our country, in the stirring times of Washington and Putnam and Paul Revere, ask your newsdealer to show you one of these books. They are stories of boys who lived in the time of the Revolution and deal with thrilling adventure and fighting between Red Coats and Continentals. Here are some of the first issues:

1. Paul Revere and the Boys of Liberty, - - - By John De Morgan
2. Fighting for Freedom; or, The Birth of the Stars and Stripes, - By Lieut. Lounsberry
3. The Young Ambassador; or, Washington's First Triumph, - By John De Morgan
4. The League of Five; or, Washington's Boy Scouts, - By Commander Post, G. A. R.
5. The First Shot for Liberty; or, The Minute Men of Massachusetts, By John De Morgan
6. Dashing Paul Jones; or, The Hero of the Colonial Navy, - By Frank Sheridan

These books can be purchased for Ten Cents, from all newsdealers, or from . . . . . .

STREET & SMITH, 238 WILLIAM STREET NEW YORK

Largest Circulation of Any 5c. Library Published

Tip Top Weekly

THE IDEAL PUBLICATION FOR THE AMERICAN YOUTH

The stories that appear in Tip Top have been written especially for the bright, up-to-date American lad. They detail the adventures of Frank and Dick Merriwell, two brothers, who are all-around athletes with plenty of dash and pluck.

LATEST NUMBERS

412—Frank Merriwell Besieged; or, Dick Merriwell's Daring Rescue

413—Frank Merriwell's Quick Work; or, Dick Merriwell's Cipher Message

414—Dick Merriwell on Hand; or, Just in Time to Win

415—Dick Merriwell's Devotion; or, Playing Against Ten Men

416—Dick Merriwell's Racket; or, An Earthquake at the School

417—Dick Merriwell's Sand; or, Winning by Pure Grit

418—Dick Merriwell's Force; or, On Hand When Needed

419—Dick Merriwell Trapped; or, The Plot of a Desperate Boy

420—Dick Merriwell's Assurance; or, Trusted To The Last

421—Dick Merriwell's Base Running; or, The Man With The Icy Hand

To be had from all newsdealers, or sent upon the receipt of price, 5c., by the Publishers

STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., New York